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Uprising of 1655.

BY RON. T. ASTLEY ATKINS.

MARCH 18, 1892.

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A PAPER READ BEFORE THE YONKERS HISTORICAL
AND LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

BY

Hon. T. ASTLEY ATKINS,

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INDIAN WARS AND THE UPRISING OF 1655.

“Upon ye maine, by the river commonly called by the Indians Aquehung, otherwise Broncke River,” there lived a few settlers, also upon the Harlem River and the creek called “Spiting Devil” by the Dutch, were to be found a number of farmers. Up the valley of Tibbett’s Brook and on the east bank of the Hudson still others ventured, while along the Sound and the East River there were, upon “ye maine” land, scanty settlements prior to the eventful years and wars we chronicle. But the records of these settlements are scarce, and he who would but dig in this often disturbed ground will find but little consolation. Much of the sparseness of records arises from the fact that the country was so thinly peopled that they had but little history to transmit and also because “ye maine” at this date was usually yoked to the island of the “Manhattoes,” at the opposite end of which in those days lay the great city of the New Netherland, New Amsterdam. Ten years later than the time at which our account opens, historical records became more numerous, and after the Indian massacre of sixteen hundred and fifty-five the island took more notice of the main land. The southernmost portion of Westchester County lying between the Sound, the Hudson and the Harlem Rivers, was, at this date, virtually a wilderness. It was subdivided by little streams, which were, as far as possible, utilized as public highways and also served as boundary lines for parcels of land granted to patroon or settler. To the casual observer this tract was to all appearance a veritable wilderness, for it was densely wooded and had no roads, and indeed contained but few open spaces. There were, however, paths or trails of one kind or another through the woods from one settled patch

to another. These paths were but seldom used, and there was, in fact, but little communication of any kind between the settlers.

About this time there was held upon the island some sort of a popular convention, in which our county, however, took no part, so much more important were the Long Island towns which sent delegates. We find, at the time the wars commenced with the Indians, scattered through the public records, a few names of families who then dwelt upon "ye maine;" but, a little later, and about the time of the "massacre," there appears evidence of a rapidly growing settlement of the Younckers and other Westchester County plantations.

The situation may be briefly summed up as follows: The Indians, as owners, had already been crowded off Manhattan Island, but they dwelt in considerable numbers thereon by permission of the Dutch. A like state of things was existent upon Long Island. Upon the main land north of the Harlem they still lived in many an ancestral nook and in many an out-of-the-way corner. Cowed, crowded, watchful, many inclined to great friendliness, others full of wrath and determination to repossess their fair fields and fisheries.

Along the Hudson, and stretching across the land far away on either side of it, were other Indian settlements, usually peacefully inclined so far as the Dutch settlers were concerned, but at strife often with other dusky tribes.

Upon Manhattan Island, and presumably upon the Van der Donck plantation to the north of it, the Indians had been accustomed to free access to streets and farms and in some instances to the houses. No doubt they thought that if the white settler could enter upon their close and take home their rabbit or their fish, they, too, had equal right to poach upon his domain. We shall see. It may not be amiss to note here a few facts as to these aboriginal owners of our manor and county.

Mr. Bancroft, in his history says that the country between the banks of the Connecticut River and the Hudson, was possessed by independent villages of the Mohe-

gans, kindred with the Manhattans of New York Island, and that the Algonkin dialect was the most widely diffused and was used by our local tribes. It is further stated that at the time of English colonization the Algonkins, from Hudson's Bay to Carolina, numbered ninety thousand. Speaking of the Algonkin dialect, one authority says that it was "prodigal of its consonants" and its style abounded in "noble metaphors."

Ruttenber, in his invaluable book upon the North River Indians, says that our local Indians were, in times of war, under rigid martial law, and that to begin a war was called by them "taking up the hatchet," but this could only be declared "for most just and important reasons." First there would be an address as follows: "The bones of your murdered countrymen lie uncovered, they demand revenge at our hands, and it is our duty to obey them; their spirits loudly call upon us and we must satisfy them. Still greater spirits watching over our honor inspire us with a resolution to go in pursuit of the murderers of our brethren. Let us go and devour them. Do not sit inactive. Follow the impulse of your hereditary valor. Anoint your hair. Paint your faces. Fill your quivers. Make the woods echo with your voices. Comfort the spirits of the deceased and revenge their blood." After this address weapons of war were collected, pouches of parched corn and maple sugar were prepared and the warriors painted their bodies. Then followed the war dance and war song:

"O poor me
 "Who am going out to fight the enemy,
 "And know not whether I shall return again
 "To enjoy the embraces of my children
 "And my wife.
 "O poor creature!
 "Whose life is not in his own hands

* * * * *

"Suffer me to return again to my children,
 "To my wife
 "And to my relations.
 "Take pity on me and preserve my life
 "And I will make thee a sacrifice."

The lives of prisoners taken in war were rarely spared, except those of women and children. Male prisoners were subjected to great torture, usually by fire. Ruttenber says of our local Indians: "More sinned against than sinning they left behind them evidences of great wrongs suffered, their enemies being the witnesses." And, further on, he remarks that "Law and justice, as civilized nations understand them, were to them unknown."

Speaking of the Indian troubles between the years sixteen hundred and forty-two and sixteen hundred and fifty-five, Governor Stuyvesant said with great truth and much bitterness that "the Dutch were clearly at fault."

The Indian Totems, or Symbols, on the Hudson River below Wappingers, were, among some tribes, the Wolf, and, among others, the Bear. North of the Manhattoes of the island there were, upon the main land of Westchester, the villages of Saeck Kill, Wickquaeskeck, Alipkonk and Sint Sinck, while, as far north as the Croton, lived the Kitchanongs. The Wickquaeskecks had several castles between the Hudson at Dobbs Ferry, and Norwalk, on Long Island Sound.

We find early complaints that the traders sold the Indians all the guns and powder they called for or could pay for.

In the early days of the settlement the wrongs of the Indians were often promptly redressed, an instance being given in Smith's History of New York, as follows:

"When the Dutch began settlements upon the banks of the Hudson the country adjacent was in subjection to the 'Five Nations', and as early as the year sixteen hundred and twenty-two the imprisonment of the Chief of the Sequins aroused the Mohicans to that extent that the offending agent of the Dutch was compelled to leave the country."

As we shall see, it was later the old policy of the devil, who, when sick, would be a Saint, but, when well again, "the devil a Saint was he." Our inoffensive Dutchmen, when few in numbers and weak in arms, were good enough to the natives and dwelt many a year in peace with them.

but when numbers increased and new farms were needed, and the thrifty Dutchman felt strong, then trouble began, and as Peter Stuyvesant said, "the Dutch were clearly at fault."

Now this greed for land which was not their own was really at the bottom of most of the quarrels between the Dutch and the natives. Finding that public sentiment at home would not be in their favor if they stole outright the farms, hunting and fishing grounds of the Indians as well as their forests, the crafty Dutchman of the Manhattoes and the main land devised a scheme of legal robbery which worked just as successfully in the long run and at the same time placated critics and their High Mightinesses at home. For instance, in the year sixteen hundred and thirty-nine certain alleged Indian owners of Kekeshick conveyed to the Dutch company a large tract of land which sounds in description at least, pretty near home being, say the Albany records, "lands which lie over against the flats of the island of the Manhates, to wit: by the great Kill." In sixteen hundred and forty-six Sachem Tackarew conveyed land upon ye maine to Adriaen Van der Donck. Tackarew, be it noted, hailed from Jersey. Somehow or other, when a Dutchman wanted a new farm, he now always found a convenient Indian to make his totem on the precious sheep-skin.

Nor was the land-grabbing of the Dutch their only crime, for we are told that in sixteen hundred and forty-five "the town of New Amsterdam was largely given up to the sale of brandy, tobacco and beer throughout the streets. Every advantage was taken by the Dutch. The Indians were employed as servants and defrauded of their wages; they were induced to drink, and, while intoxicated, were robbed of their furs and the goods they had purchased. They were angry at the price paid for their lands by the Dutch."

On the other side, the wily Dutchmen alleged that the Indians had killed their cows, horses and hogs, and had cruelly murdered ten persons in as many years, and that the murderers had been demanded from the Indians, but that they had refused to deliver them to the authorities.

If half of the charges against our stolid and withal

pious Dutch ancestors were true, they must have been monsters, indeed. In the Holland Documents will be found a letter from one John Onderhill, in which he states one of the reasons for the war we are about to chronicle. He says: "But a great portion of the lands which we occupy being as yet unpaid for, the Indians come daily and complain that they have been deceived by the Dutch Secretary, etc." They bought the Indians' lands, occupied them and failed to pay for the greater or a great proportion of them. They sold goods to the Indians, got them drunk and took back the goods. They cheated them out of their wages. They robbed them of their furs. And the gentle worm turned at last. The mild-tempered inhabitants of the main and island who had trusted the Dutchman and shared their land with him turned and in ten years made way with ten Dutchmen. Had the Indians taken the Dutchmen's house and land and stolen his bought goods and furs, does any one who knows what these immigrants from Holland and England were, suppose that only ten Indians would have been slaughtered in ten years? The record of other colonies forbids the belief.

Let us now turn to some of the events of the few years prior to the massacre of sixteen hundred and fifty-five, which left scarce a settler upon our hills and meadows. As early as sixteen hundred and forty-one the New York Civil List says "troubles with the Indians and complications with the English now began to seriously embarrass the colony." It was in this latter year that Director Kieft called the first popular assemblage "to consider Indian troubles." This convention was reconvened the next year for the same purpose. It may be noted that this war closed three years after this latter session and that Oloff Van Cortlandt was one of the Commissioners who concluded a treaty of peace with the Manhatans.

It is stated in various histories that in the year of the first convention the Dutch attacked the unarmed Indians at Pavonia. It is said that they were the North River Indians, the Weckquaeskecks, from Dobbs Ferry, and the

Tappans, from Piermont, who had fled from Manhattan Island. One authority says that "the naked and unsuspecting tribes could offer little resistance; the noise of musketry mingled with the yells of the victims, and nearly one hundred Indians perished in the carnage. Men might be seen mangled and helpless, suffering from cold and hunger. Children were tossed into the stream, and, as their parents plunged to their rescue, the soldiers prevented their landing, that both parent and child might drown." In addition to these wanton murders, thirty Indians were killed at Corlears Hook, on Manhattan Island, while asleep. O'Callaghan, in his history of the New Netherlands, says "this estranged the Long Island Indians, who formed an alliance with the North River Indians. Every settler they laid hands on was murdered."

The next year we find it recorded that seven Long Island Indian prisoners were "turned over to Underhill's Company of Dutch and English by the English Minister Fordham at Hempstead. Three of the seven were killed (unarmed) in a cellar, two were towed in the water until drowned, two were brutally murdered by soldiers at Fort Amsterdam." It was alleged that they were pig stealers.

The "war" lasted about five years, and an eminent authority estimates that the Dutchmen killed during that time some sixteen hundred Indians. On the white side of the question it is written that "the Dutch pointed to piles of ashes from burnt houses, barns, barracks and other buildings and the bones of cattle." "Our fields lie fallow and waste, our dwellings and other buildings are burnt, all this through a foolish hankering after war, for it is known to all right-thinking men here that these Indians have lived as lambs among us until a few years ago, injuring no one and affording every assistance to our nation," says one of the most veracious of Dutch histories of these times.

After the so-called treaty of peace there seems to have been a period of quiet, so far as Westchester and Manhattan Island were concerned. That is to say, there was a period

in which but little burning or slaughter occurred, compared to the troublous time we have spoken of. But there was evil intent upon both sides and each side awaited with ill-concealed venom for the revenge.

Mr. Bolton gives a quotation from the protest of the Eight Men or council concerning one treaty of peace, which it is well to give in full, for it shows the value put upon an alleged "treaty of peace." In the year sixteen hundred and forty-four they protested that "a semblance of peace was attempted to be patched up last Spring with two or three tribes of savages towards the north by a stranger, whom we, for cause, shall not now name, without one of the Company's servants having been present, while our principle enemies have been unmolested. This peace hath borne little fruit for the common advantage and reputation of our lords; for so soon as these savages had stowed away their maize into holes, they began again to murder our people in various directions. They rove in parties continually around day and night on the Island of Manhattaus, slaying our folks, not a thousand paces from the forts, and 'tis now arrived at such a pass that no one dare move a foot to fetch a stick of fire wood with out a strong escort." The next year our Adriean van der Donck and others furnished the needful to buy of for a season the "Mohegans" or "Mahicanders."

It will amuse and instruct even the most casual reader to look through one of these so-called Indian conveyances and one is chosen at random from the Book of Patents, as cited by Bolton; it runs thus:

"Beginning at the south side of a creek called Bisightick, and so ranging along Hudson's River, southerly to a creek or fall called by the Indians Weghquesike, and by the Christians called Lawrence's Plantation, and from the mouth of said creek or fall upon a due east course, to a creek called by the Indians Nippiran and by the Christians Youncker's Kill; and from thence along the west side of the said creek or kill, as the same runs to lands formerly bought." In presence of Emient, Sachem of Siapham, signed by Kictawough and others, consideration for this

magnificent plot, and this, it may be said, was many years after the wars just related, was one hundred and twenty-four yards of wampum, twelve blankets, twelve kettles, ten guns, fifty pounds of powder, thirty bars of lead, twelve shirts, twelve pair of stockings, thirty bows, eight fathom of water cloth, eight coates, fifty knives, twenty boxes, two ankers of rum, two and a half vats of beere, three drawing knives, two coopers adds, ten yearthen jugs and ten axis."

Patience with the North River Indians had ceased to be a virtue. They had been plundered, deceived, murdered in cold and in hot blood by the settlers who bought their lands for a few yards of wampum and a lot of pots, kettles and rum. So the weary decade of the forties had worn itself out and left a record of which civilization may well be ashamed. But one thing may be said of our Dutch ancestry, which cannot be said of our English or Spanish settlers, and that is that there was no pretence of religion in the Dutch aggression. It was not the bible in one hand and the sword in the other, but the Dutchman bought or stole the land and the Indians starved, died or moved on, the Dutchmen did not allege the necessity of his conversion, but called the Indian a Duyvil and treated him with the same distinguished courtesy that their more refined progeny do at the present day. In these days anything that was black passed for a devil, either on the earth or in the depths of the nether world.

The early years of the fifties were rather quieter than the last of the forties. In the early portion of the year sixteen hundred and fifty-five, contemporary records show conclusively that there were a very considerable number of farmers on the main land north of the Harlem River, but the sweep of the Indian tempest of that year cleaned out man and beast and destroyed much evidence regarding the settlement at Yonkers.

One of the most concise reports of the rising of this year may be found in O'Callaghan's History and is as follows: "A party of savages, Mohegans and others from Esopus, Hackingsaack, Tappaan, Stamford and Onkeway, as far

east as Connecticut, estimated by some to amount to nineteen hundred in number, from five hundred to eighteen hundred of whom were armed, landed suddenly before daybreak (September 15th) in sixty-four canoes at New Amsterdam, and, whilst the greater part of the inhabitants were still buried in sleep, scattered themselves through the streets and burst into several of the houses on pretence of looking for Indians from the north, but in reality to avenge the death of a squaw whom Van Dyck, the late Attorney-General had killed for stealing a few peaches."

They shot Van Dyck in the breast with an arrow, and immediately the little town was wild with excitement and terror. The military being called from the fort, attacked the savages, and drove them to their canoes. The Indians sailed across the Hudson to the village of Pavonia and set it on fire, and took as prisoners a large number of women and children.

Upon the mainland there was a panic and all who could fled to Manhattan Island to put themselves under the protection of the soldiers. Property counted for but little in those terrible hours. It is remarked by one writer that "a visitation so dreadful spread consternation abroad. All the country people except Amesspoort, Breucklen and Midwont and the negro hamlets took wing and fled to the Mannhattans." In fact, as far up as Esopus the settlers abandoned their farms.

The prisoners were carried north and held by the Weckquaeskecks and Highland Indians. These poor women and children must then have been held by the Indians in that region just to the north and north-east of the City of Yonkers. We need not here recount the fate which befell many.

It is said that during the three days this storm raged, the Dutch lost one hundred people who were killed or maimed; and that fully one hundred and fifty were carried off into captivity; and that twenty-eight farms and plantations were devastated and three hundred people driven away from their burned and ravaged homes. The damage, as estimated in money, was alleged to be about eighty thousand dollars.

To the north of us the Indians took their revenge almost in kind. At Esopus, in revenge for the slaughter of their people by one Sergeant Stoll, the Indians burned houses, barns and harvest, and killed horses and cattle. "They tied their Dutch captives to stakes around a fire, tore off the nails of victims, bit off their fingers, crushed their fingers between stones, scorched their skin with fire brands, cut pieces of flesh from their bodies, and as they died tossed their bodies into the flames."

"Prowling bands of savages flitted in and out of the woods. The whole country (about the Hudson River) was struck with horror," says another authority. But who shall judge the Indian of that year harshly?

There is little doubt that our Westchester Indians took a very active part in the so-called Massacre of 1655. After the retreat of the Indians to their fastnesses it is recorded that the settlers gradually returned to their "avocations," which means probably that the farmers returned to what was left of their farms and did the best they could with them.

Peter Stuyvesant, in a letter of his written to Holland after the restoration of peace and quiet here, speaks of our own dear Yonkers plantation as "the lands of old Verdonck (meaning Adrian Van der Donck), divided and settled by his children and associates in various plantations and farms; but who, in the massacre, were absconded with many others; all which lands are situated here and bordering on our island, only divided by a small creek which in some places by low water is passable."

And so the Yonkers plantation was again opened to settlement, and again the Indian was pushed back. Perhaps after this the wily Dutchman gave him a better price for his land.

Authorities used in this paper :

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